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No. 38.

The Teaching of History in Secondary Schools

By

PERCIVAL R. COLE, M.A., Ph.D., F.C.P.,

Vice-Principal, Sydney Teachers' College, and Lecturer in Education, University of Sydney.

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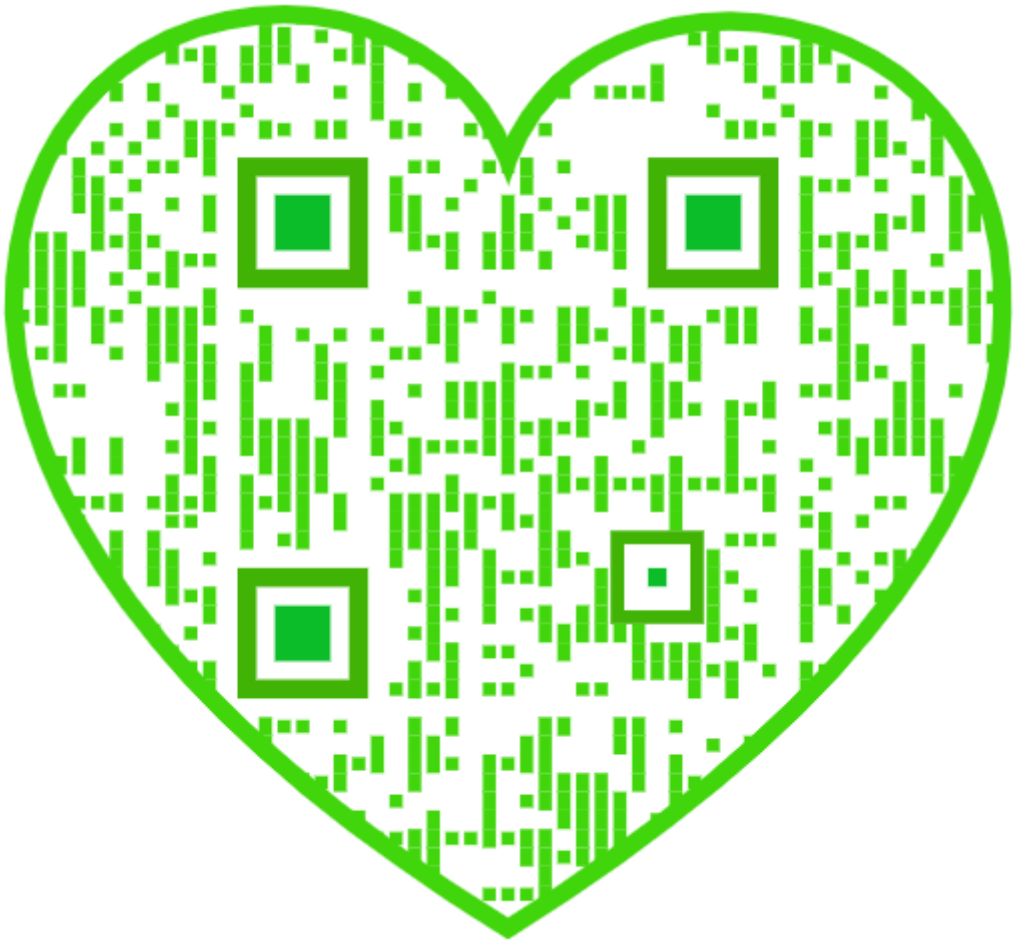

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THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS monograph is intended to assist secondary school teachers who desire to treat history in such a way as to ensure the mental development of their pupils. Owing largely to the influence of the Director of Education, Mr. Peter Board, M.A., C.M.G., and of the Principal of the Sydney Teachers' College, Professor Alexander Mackie, M.A., the past decade has been fruitful in the development of scientific methods of primary teaching. Much still remains to be done before the method of secondary teaching may be expected to be adequately standardised. This paper is in close agreement with the published works of Mr. Keatinge; but I have gone beyond Mr. Keatinge in applying the canons of induction to the teaching of history, and in drawing up a general scheme according to which rational lessons may be planned.

P.R.C.

The Teaching of History in Secondary Schools.

[Paper read before the Teachers' Guild, August, 1918.]

We, as teachers interested in secondary education, need to assure ourselves of the worth we attribute to each subject in the curriculum of the secondary school, and especially of the value of the subject of history, of the range which rightly belongs to it, of the point of view which should be adopted by its teachers, of the method by which it is to be taught, and of the reality of the spirit of loyalty which is associated with it by our national tradition. Let us first ask ourselves the question: What is the subject-matter of secondary history? There are three sciences which treat directly of the past life of humanity—namely, anthropology, biography, and history. The first of these, anthropology, has to do with the natural history of man; its subject is the human animal. The anthropologist studies the races into which mankind is divided, just as the biologist studies the species of plant or animal life. The second science, biography, limits its attention to the lives of individuals. The third science, history, is not the study of man as an animal, nor is it a study of individual men and women; it is, indeed, the study of man considered as a member of a social group. As teachers of history, we must not disdain the facts contributed by the allied sciences; but we are under no obligation to become expert anthropologists or biographical investigators. It is equally unnecessary that we should teach our pupils how many shot may be put into the skull of a Papuan, or whether Rousseau may have committed his children to an orphan asylum.

All grades of history teaching are concerned with the social life of man. It is possible, however, to differentiate between the function of history teaching upon one level and the function of the same process upon another level. Thus, although the primary school, the secondary school, and the University all attempt the study of the past life of man considered as a member of society, it cannot be said that either the aim or the method remains constant throughout the three stages of instruction. The remark may be ventured, however, that the forms of thought employed in the primary and in the secondary school differ, or ought to differ, more widely than the forms of thought employed in the secondary schools and in the University. In the secondary school, at least during the latter half of his course, the pupil is already endowed with all the mental powers which in the University may be brought to a higher perfection, and may be applied to more intricate problems. In the primary school, however, and possibly during the earlier half of his secondary course, the thoughts of the pupil are normally concrete and imaginative, rather than abstract and rational.

It follows that the teaching of history in the primary school should be chiefly devoted to the cultivation of historical imagination; while in the secondary school, at least in the upper grades, it should aim at historical understanding. The primary school will endeavour, by the use of vivid narrative, pictures, maps, models, and other illustrations, to assist pupils to image for themselves as much of the grand pageant of the past as may

be presented without haste or incoherence. There is no reason why the imagination should not continue to be employed at all stages of the study of history; but it is more essential, for example, that a portrait of Queen Elizabeth should be shown to a primary than to a secondary class. In the upper classes of a secondary school, however, the teacher will concentrate his attention not upon recalling the images of people, things, and events, but upon relations of cause and effect. Such relations, which are the characteristic interest of science in general, cannot be neglected even in primary work, especially as the majority of primary school pupils never reach the secondary stage of schooling. Yet causal relations only become the main pivot of the teaching of history in the high school; and then possibly only after the first two years.

For two reasons, however, we may assume for our present purpose that the secondary teaching of history is concerned throughout with causal sequence, rather than with any other object. Firstly, our immediate concern is with distinctively secondary teaching. For this reason we need not dwell upon the pageantry of the past, which is emphatically an interest of the primary school. Secondly, while the imagery of past objects and events is not to be neglected in lower secondary classes, it is clear that even with these classes the teacher must give much of his attention to the causal connection of events. It is already time for the schoolboy, who cannot but possess some knowledge of cause and effect as they appear in his own everyday life, to comprehend that great historical events do not occur without causes, both immediate and remote. He can make use of causation, just as he can make use of time, without being able to define the concept.

If the aim of the secondary teacher of history is to review the past life of humanity from the scientific point of view, then everything which has no bearing upon causal relations is irrelevant to his purpose. He is concerned neither with the dramatic nor with the picturesque as such. Shakespearian history is valid for primary but not for secondary schools. Shakespeare can treat King John without Magna Charta; not so the secondary teacher, for whom Magna Charta, not King John, represents the central scientific problem of the period. Even moral judgments are not the concern of historical science. They are affected by political bias, and are rarely made on scientific grounds. Broad theories are of little scientific value unless well grounded and rigidly tested. Thus the secondary teacher of history will dwell not upon the beauty, the emotion, or the goodness of the past as such, but upon the way in which certain causes have led to certain results. His principal aim is to use his material to develop not the imagination, the feelings, or the self-righteousness of his pupils, but their intellectual power.

We are now in a position to define the content of our subject, to indicate our point of view, and to establish our method.

Our body of knowledge is the past life of man, considered not as an animal, nor as a series of individuals, but as a member of society. We need not be historians; but we must know how historians get their results. They

cannot observe the past, which is their material, directly. Neither can they experiment with it. They are thus at a great disadvantage in comparison with physical scientists, or even with sociologists or psychologists. Their materials are drawn chiefly from various narratives, documents, literary and archæological remains. No historian can even be a master of all the material which he uses. He must take to a certain extent upon trust the results of philology, palæography, diplomatics, epigraphy, numismatics, archæology, chronology, and historical geography. Yet his work is scientific, because of the critical and thorough methods employed by him in the search for truth, and because he reaches reasonably accurate results, if not the perfect and exact truth which belongs to no science unless it be to mathematics.

Our point of view is that of science, or of the search for truth wherever the truth is to be found.

Our method is that of reasoning. It is clear that inductive and deductive reasoning may be employed by the secondary school teacher and his pupils—(1) in drawing conclusions from passages of source material, and (2) in the endeavour to see the relation between cause and effect in connection with the events narrated by the teacher or described in the text-book. It is not so certain that canons of induction, such as those drawn up by John Stuart Mill, may be profitably employed in the teaching of history, since these canons were founded to some extent upon the presupposition that experimental methods are possible of application.

Let us, however, endeavour to apply the methods of agreement, difference, concomitant variations, and residues to the historical problem of the causes of the Renaissance:—

1. The pupils having previously prepared the chapter upon the Renaissance in their text-book, will mention the various events and conditions which may have affected the movement—*e.g.*, the invention of gunpowder, invention of printing, geographical discoveries, genius of the people, rise of despotism in the Italian cities, recovery of many classical manuscripts, development of art and literature, fall of Constantinople.

2. The method of agreement is applied. Was the Renaissance felt wherever gunpowder was known; wherever printing was practised; etc.? A few of the alleged "causes," such as the discovery of gunpowder, geographical discovery, and the recovery of classical MSS., may be thus eliminated; but the results are inconclusive. It may be seen, however, that all the countries in which the Renaissance was profoundly felt participated in the use of printing, in rich endowment of individual genius, in the institution of despotic government, in the development of art and literature, and in the resultant benefits of the fall of Constantinople. It is probable, therefore, that some of these conditions had to do with the causes of the movement.

3. The method of difference is applied. Can two countries be found, one with and one without a Renaissance, differing in the main conditions and events of their history only in certain limited respects? If so, we have an important clue to the cause of the Renaissance. It is not exactly possible to find two such countries. It is evident, however, that the northern Renaissance sprang from the Italian; and that there was a Renaissance in Italy before there was one in Germany. At this time, the important differences lay not in the knowledge of printing, which existed in Germany before it did in Italy, nor in the recovery of classical manuscripts, which is associated almost as closely with the one country as with the other. They lay rather in the genius of the people, in the personal despotism which had arisen on the ruins of the feudal system in Italy, in the development of art and literature, and possibly in the time at which Greek scholars from Constantinople made their appearance in the respective countries.

4. The method of concomitant variations is applied. Did the Renaissance in the various countries of Western Europe vary according to the genius of the people? Yes. Did it vary in accordance with the degree to which government had become non-feudal, centralised, and despotic? The answer, after investigation, will probably be a qualified affirmative rather than a negative. Did it vary according to the period at which Greek scholars from Constantinople made their influence felt? Not altogether, for Dante wrote without any such influence, and Petrarch with but little. As for art and literature, they are clearly dependent in the main upon genius, which has survived the application of all the canons of inductive inference, in so far as the present inquiry is concerned.

5. The method of residues is applied, in order that pupils may discover whether the conditions still remaining after the various inductive tests have been applied, namely, native Italian genius and Italian non-feudal despotism, are dual causes of the Renaissance, or whether one of these conditions comprises the whole cause. In the Renaissance, how much is accounted for by natural genius? The following characteristics at least—a new note in art and literature, perhaps even a new spirit of investigation, and an assertion of the right to think. But the Renaissance meant more than this. It meant that classicism became the fashion, and that the humanists or scholars of the period found profit in learning, literature, art, and diplomacy. Native genius does not account for all this. The personal despotism of tyrants, however, does account for these residual conditions. To secure their usurped thrones, to defend and to camouflage their own characters, to establish their reputation among other States, and to gratify their own tastes, the tyrants vied with one another in attracting humanists to their courts, and in the encouragement of poets, artists, and other men of genius who might create works of art in which their patrons' names should be enshrined.

It would thus appear, as a matter of inductive inference, that the main causes of the Italian Renaissance were—firstly, the native genius of the people; and, secondly, the foundation of centralised despotisms upon the ruins of the feudal system in Italy.

It may be objected that few lessons in history can proceed from beginning to end simply according to the canons of inductive inference. Let us, therefore, consider another lesson, largely but not exclusively inductive, the outlines of which are suggested by Allen†. In this instance, some of the actual questions to be asked of the class are given. This time the lesson deals with the causes of the Hundred Years' War.

The pupils have read their text-book with the lesson in view. When asked for the principal cause they may probably answer that Edward III claimed the French Crown.

Did he really believe that he should be King of France?

The pupils may be divided between yes and no; but are unlikely to be able to prove their answers.

Was he too noble to make any claim that was not well grounded?

How can you prove that he was not?

Had he always claimed the French throne?

As a matter of fact, he had recognised Philip VI as King of France in 1331.

When victorious at Crecy, did he try to make himself king?

The fact that he did not seems to indicate that the Crown of France was not the real object of the war. Henry V, who really wanted the Crown of France, acted very differently.

Had the French king given Edward any trouble?

The pupils have read in their text-book that he had given support to the Scots.

Had the French king opposed England elsewhere?

During the reigns of Edward I and Edward II the French had attacked Gascony.

Why did England wish to keep Gascony?

Chiefly because of the wine trade.

Why were the French and English unable to reach an agreement in connection with Gascony?

Chiefly because of organised French piracy.

Had England any other dispute with France?

The Flanders wool trade.

Was Edward III personally indignant with the French king?

We have no real knowledge as to this, or of such personal indignation as was felt by William I or by Henry V in connection with their French wars.

† J. W. Allen, The Place of History in Education.

Did the war have nothing to do with the personality of Edward III?

If so, it must have been caused by his subjects bringing pressure to bear upon him. There is no record of such pressure. This makes it probable that Edward III personally wanted war.

Is it safe to ignore the personality of any mediæval king?

Why not?

There is thus reason to believe that the personal will of Edward entered into the cause of the war.

Had Edward any personal interest in Gascony?

We know that Edward received from Gascony large quantities of wine, for much of which he did not pay. Edward also received Customs dues on Gascon wine, and to lose Gascony, or to allow continued French piracy, meant loss of income. The war promised greater security of trade and of personal income, as well as honour and glory. We can readily see why Edward may have desired the war.

Could he count upon his subjects?

Yes, because they also were affected by piracy and by trade interests. It was even to their interest, as sparing additional taxes, that the Royal income from Customs dues should be large.

The class now understands, as far as the evidence admits, the causes of the Hundred Years' War. The lesson is offered as an example of the scientific treatment which history should receive in the secondary school. Some teachers allege that so much ground has to be covered that they have no time to proceed in this way. It is evident, however, that much ground has been covered in each of the lessons which have been outlined; that not only has a chapter of the text-book been prepared, but that some revision has been involved; that discipline in historical reasoning has been provided; and that, even from the lower standpoint of examination grading, those candidates who are able to discuss matters in the manner indicated, and who have been trained in the analysis of causal relations, will receive much greater credit from any intelligent examiner than those who merely repeat the remarks of the author of their text-book.

If the rational type of lesson is to prevail in secondary schools, it may be well to formulate the steps by which it may be generally conducted. These are:—

(1) The statement of the problem.

(2) The selection of apparently relevant facts.

(3) The framing of an hypothesis.

(4) The test of the hypothesis. It may be necessary to repeat steps (3) and (4) several times before an hypothesis is found to satisfy the test.

(5) The formulation of the result of the inquiry.

(6) The application of this result to subsequent historical problems. This step may be taken during subsequent class work as opportunity may arise.

Although all pupils in the secondary school should be trained to appreciate causal relations, their ability in this direction will vary to no small extent. In general, they are divisible into two classes—the first consisting of those who can understand causal relations when these have been explained to them; and the second, doubtless a smaller class, who are able to develop sufficient historical power to establish causal relations for themselves. The first class, broadly speaking, should be our pass candidates, the second class our honour candidates. The power to establish causal connections for oneself is, however, necessarily a matter of degree, so that it is necessary for the teacher of history to give practice in this direction, as well as practice in comprehending relations already established, to all his pupils. To this end he should periodically present to his class passages of source material, from which they are to endeavour to reason their way to definite conclusions.

The following extract, with questions attached, was submitted to high school pupils of the third year:—

After this the king had a great consultation, and spoke very deeply with his witan concerning this land, how it was held, and what were its tenantry. He then sent his men all over England, into every shire, and caused them to ascertain how many hundred hides of land it contained, and what lands the king possessed therein, what cattle there were in the several counties, and how much revenue he ought to receive yearly from each. He also caused them to write down how much land belonged to his archbishops, his abbots, and his earls, and, that I may be brief, what property every inhabitant of all England possessed in land or in cattle, and how much money this was worth. So very narrowly did he cause the survey to be made, that there was not a single hide nor a rood of land, nor—it is shameful to relate that which he thought no shame to do—was there an ox, or a cow, or a pig passed by, and that was not set down in the accounts, and then all these writings were brought to him.

(*a*) From reading this passage, what do you conclude about the writer?

(*b*) What do you conclude about the king's reasons for making the survey?

(*c*) Date the passage as nearly as you can.

The following answers were among the best received:—

(1)

(*a*) The writer of the passage was probably, since he is so conversant with the details of the survey, a member of either the witan or the surveying party. Since he also seems indignant at the minute and careful inquiry into the possessions of the landed class, one might conclude that he was a sufferer in the process.

(*b*) The king was undoubtedly short of funds if he took such a degree of care and trouble to ascertain the exact number of possessions his subjects had, and undertook the business most probably in order to ascertain by how much he would be able to increase the burden of taxation.

(*c*) He must also have possessed enormous power and influence over his subjects to be enabled to undertake the survey without active resistance from them. This draws the conclusion that the monarch was William I or his immediate successors, Henry I or Henry II, who alone could have undertaken the business with sufficient determination. In any case, the witan did not exist after the Plantagenet period, so we are forced to conclude that it was the Conqueror himself who instituted the survey in preparation for the Doomsday Book about 1070.

(2)

This passage refers to the account of all the property in England which William the Conqueror had drawn up, and which was called the Doomsday Book. Its date is between 1066-1070.

It is evident that the writer was an Anglo-Saxon, and disapproved of William's policy, and considered it beneath the dignity of a king to inquire about the private property of every individual.

The reasons that caused William to make this survey were—(1) The king had no settled revenue, like that which he receives now, and depended upon the income derived from his own private possessions, and from the taxes that he levied; it would therefore be necessary that he see that he lost nothing of what was due to him, as even at best his income was insufficient for his needs; (2) William I was a complete stranger to England, and had no idea as to its wealth or resources. It was necessary that he should know, so that he might know to what amount he could levy taxes.

These answers serve to illustrate the fact that the reasoning power of high school pupils is sufficient to justify tasks of this kind, which are, moreover, absorbingly interesting. Although they are selected as among the best offered, it is reasonable to suppose that a class trained in such exercises, as this class was not, would be able to do work of a correspondingly superior order.

In the Intermediate Certificate Examination for 1917, English History, Part A, four questions were asked, only two of which were to have been attempted. Two of these questions were directed towards the interpretation of source material; and it was found that those candidates who attempted these questions were reasonably successful. It was felt, however, that at this stage questions founded upon passages of source material should be such as to call for no great originality or rational power. For example, two contradictory letters of Charles I were quoted, and the pupils were invited to show how far these letters illustrate the character of the writer. For those who had read their text-book or had heeded their teacher the answer was comparatively easy.

There is no contradiction, then, between the setting of these questions to intermediate pupils and the statement already made—that ability to reason for themselves should be the quality which should distinguish honour from pass students at the leaving certificate stage. The question is important, for there are some who would abolish honour papers for history at the leaving certificate examination. If the distinction above made is justifiable there can be no excuse for eliminating the honour paper in history. There should be a paper to discriminate between candidates who possess historical power and those who merely possess historical comprehension. The latter should pass, the former should gain honours; yet in an ordinary pass examination the one class might do as well as the other. The same paper will not serve to detect those who merely understand the conventional interpretation of history and also those who have developed historical power.

Finally, it may well be claimed that history is a subject which the people approve, which the war has shown to need encouragement in the national interest, and which conservatism has always deprecated or actively resisted. History is one of the most accessible of school subjects, and all with any pretensions to education have some sort of grounding in it. The time when there was one education for the gentleman, another for the worker, should not be revived. The national interest requires the complete abolition of educational privilege; so that no greater dignity shall attach to one intellectual study than to another. Nay, if any one subject is to be privileged, as I think it is not, let that subject be history. A man may be well educated without knowing Latin or Greek, he may be well educated without knowing French or mathematics, but he cannot be well educated without a knowledge of the past; and if I should honour one secondary subject, or one secondary teacher, above another, which I do not, it would be the subject which explains the past life of man as a member of a social group, and the teacher who is inspired by the spirit of this subject and who devotes himself to the cultivation of an intelligent patriotism in the minds and hearts of the people.

Sydney: William Applegate Gullick, Government Printer.—1918.

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